

APPENDIX 3

THE TEHRAN JOURNAL

SEPTEMBER 14, 1974

AND THERE'S AN EXCESS OF
POLITICS IN THE SPORTS ARENA

When it comes to politics, the Seventh Asian Games in Tehran, has seen more than its fair share. And that is one aspect of the games that the Tehran organizing committee, who set out so admirably to have things fair and square at this event, are not too happy about.

Political disruptions at the games began on a major scale with the Chinese refusing to enter the arena for a fencing bout with an Israeli contendeer. Since then, they've gone on to include the Pakistanis refusing to play basketball with the Israelis, the North Koreans refusing to meet the Israeli football team on Thursday and the Kuwait footballers announcing that they will not play Israel in Saturday's match.

In between the Chinese have also walked out of other arenas and between them all the sportsmen and team officials refusing to meet this or that team, have managed to throw the games into a war of words and walkouts unequalled in previous Asian Games.

The political bickering even went into the medical side of the games. When doping charges came - including those that were eventually cleared up - some team officials were going around intimidating that "someone" from "such and such a nation"

was meanwhile heaving verbal balls of fire at the suspected nation for "cheating" in the sports arena.

And with all the dope talk going on and the "we won't play them" mix-ups, team officials and sportsmen, alike have been having their full say outside the sports arena, giving their reasons in full, which, seeing as they are slated full of political blasts, are not worth repeating.

In the middle of all this very unsporting activity, DPRK spectators and officials at a boxing match choose to storm into the boxing ring, fists at the ready, to dispute a jury ruling when one of their nation's prize boxers lost. While this wasn't a political event as such, it was enough to create another storm of, again unsporting, confusion when the police had to be moved in to quell the row.

The whole spectacle in Tehran - decked with political backbiting behind the scenes, mostly among team officials with the sportsmen left in confusion in the middle - illustrates just how far the emergence of politics in sports arena has come. In fact, with Munich currently standing as the most glaring example of the passing of the sports arena as a neutral zone, it would seem that they could be here to stay.

Perhaps the state of things which occurred in Tehran which at the start was sparked by the Chinese, is best phrased by a Chinese official who declined to be identified.

"There are", he said, "some things that we cannot forget - not even in the sports ring."

When a nation admits that it is not prepared - or

not willing - to concentrate on sports and forget politics, and a nation like China with such superb sports prowess as that illustrated in Tehran, then there would not appear to be much hope for the future of politically clean sports events in the future.

Does China feel the same way? Would they expect similar walkouts in the future?

"We cannot say," said the official, "we are only thinking of the way things stand today."

For most of the press people covering the Tehran games the political happenings here have come as a surprise.

Newsmen we spoke to from Indonesia, South Korea, Japan and even Chinese and Pakistani members, were not expecting to see the flowering of a political battle on the tennis courts, in the fencing room, in the football pitch and beside the basketball nets.

The unhappiest newsman we spoke to was one from Israel who did not comment fully on the events to date but simply summed up his feeling by saying, "I came to Tehran to cover good, clean sport and I've ended up writing about politics."

Many of the press people at the games in fact, say they seem to have spent their time writing "more about political events than sports".

While that is not entirely true, because the games have provided some excellent sports copy, there has obviously been enough political activity to have left a sharp impression on the newsmen's minds.

How do the visiting newsmen feel the Tehran show of

walkouts is going to affect the Asian Games of the future and, indeed, other major sports events from the Olympic down?

Generally, they feel that after the Munich Olympic disaster which showed that the international sports arena can no longer be considered as an honored, non-political, neutral testing ground for the feats of the human being, anything can happen.

One suggestion to stop a similar display of political grievances at future Asian Games at least, was given by a South Korean journalist who said he was "totally upset" by the political meanderings in Tehran.

"What we must do is get all participating nations to sign an official document saying they will take part in all sports events, regardless of political differences, or else stay at home," he said.

It sounds very nice. But would it in fact stop similar occurrences. Would team officials, so obviously influenced by feelings back home, be willing to concentrate on winning national prestige through sports, rather than gaining newspaper for their walkouts?

The South Korean, and other journalists from Asia and the Western world, feel that such a ruling - perhaps with added possible penalties imposed for nations who break it - would at least force recognition that the Asian Games, and other international sports events, are completely neutral exhibition grounds for sports and sports alone.

"If something isn't done," said the Korean, "then politics will gradually sneak into every international sports event and the spirit of sports competition will be lost."

Perhaps the entrance of politics into the sports arena, both here and at other events before, is best summed up by a Western journalist we spoke to.

"The entrance of politics into the Asian Games could mean the end of an admirable competition of the strength and effort of men and women out to break sports records," he said.

"Politics must be kept out of sports, otherwise there will be nothing more to watch. The time has come for all sporting nations to remember that if they want to continue in this drive of showing the success of human beings in the sports arena, then they must play politics at home - not through their sportsmen."